A WORD FOR PEACE.

A

CHRISTMAS DISCOURSE

BY

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DISCOURSE.

MATTH. V. 9.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACE-MAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

If the peace-makers are called the children of God, whose children shall the war-makers be called? A question to be pondered.

I use the present as a most appropriate occasion to utter a few words in behalf of Peace. I would observe this day by seeking to express for myself and to inspire in you the heart-felt abhorrence of War, which becomes Christian men. The subject belongs to the day, the birthday of Him who is emphatically styled 'The Prince of Peace', the great festival of that Religion in which we profess to rejoice as the religion of peace, the festival also of those domestic affections, on which a condition of war inflicts infinite calamities.

The subject is likewise fitted to the time. There has been now for some months past a rumour of war, like the low muttering of the thunder which precedes the storm. I suppose that, in the opinion of most, if not of every one of you, it is the merest rumour, the idlest talk, which will soon

die away, and leave not a trace behind. Idle as it may be, it has proved serious enough already to make itself felt in those transactions of trade and money, which are sensitive to the slightest breath, and in which so many interests are implicated. I am not, however, myself disposed to regard the reports of war which have been recently running through the land, in any other light than as idle talk. I cannot bring myself to believe, that such a thing as bloody, barbarian, unchristian, inhuman war is possible, least of all, between the offspring of the same stock. I cannot believe that the brethren of the foremost of the great families of the earth are about to imbrue their hands in one another's blood.

And yet when I ask myself, why it is that I do not believe a war between Great Britain and this country possible, I can get no satisfactory answer.

A little while ago, thousands in the land found it just as difficult to believe that this country would ever consent deliberately and formally, by a positive act, to sanction and legalize the horrid trade in human flesh, to extend the protection and pledge the power of this Union to a vast territory, which has done all that it could to make slavery hopeless and eternal. It was very well known that the people of this country were indisposed to have anything to do with slavery, in the way of doing what they might to abolish it, in those States in which it already existed. But when the question was sprung upon us: Shall Slavery be extended and authorized anew? Shall we perpetuate it? Shall we enlarge its boundaries? Shall we open a new market to the slave-trade? I did think that some considerable portion of the country would have risen at once and uttered a negative so deep and decisive, that the project of Annexation, planned in secret and

suddenly brought to light, would have been dashed into atoms at once. But the hope has been blasted. The deed has been done, and done forever. With the blood of our fathers, shed in behalf of human rights, hardly dry under our feet, with the memorials of their costly services in the cause of human liberty all around us, we have bowed down to the slave power. We have done what we could to strengthen and enlarge the dominion of Slavery. We have consented to wring the hearts of a great multitude of our fellow beings with all the pangs and tortures of a life-long bondage. If the people of this country have consented to such an act, by which the fundamental principles of their own Declaration of Rights, and the essential law of our common Christianity by which we hope to be saved, are thus grossly outraged, why may they not be ready to wash their hands in fraternal blood? What is to prevent them from plunging into all the folly, and guilt, and horror of war? Certainly there is no feeling of humanity alive in the land to prevent it; no tenderness of heart for the suffering that will result from war; no trembling solicitude for the dear cause of human happiness.

But it will be said that the cases are very different. In regard to the act of annexing a great slave State to the country which has just been perpetrated, there were great interests concerned, which made that act profitable, and which have rendered the people insensible to the principles of Right, which were also involved in it. And although the original proposers of this act expressly avowed it as one of their objects to strengthen slavery, and to enhance the value of human flesh in the old States, although the South would never have given its support to this act, if its effect were to destroy slavery; yet many who have acquiesced in it at the North,

have persuaded themselves, that it would tend to promote the cause of human freedom, and that the evil might be done for the sake of the good that would come. But whatever have been the influences which have brought the whole country to this fatal acquiescence in a great wrong, in a palpable violation of Religion and of Right, it is manifest that the interests, the Self-interest of the nation has been in its favour.

It will be urged, that it is not for our interest to go to war; and the same motive, it is trusted, which has led us to consent to Annexation, will keep us from quarrelling with Great Britain. It is not for the interest of either country to destroy the pacific relations now existing between them. And for this reason, because it is against our interest, we believe that war is impossible. I admit, Self-interest is a very powerful agent in the world. It exercises a wide and mighty sway. It does much to preserve the peace of nations. But men are not always and altogether governed by a regard to their own interests. There are passions in the human heart, by which man may be excited and hurried away into a course of conduct diametrically opposed to that which a concern for his own advantage recommends. These passions take no counsel of reason or self-interest. When once they are awakened, they will pursue and insist upon their own gratification, at every hazard, at the cost of wealth, and comfort, and life, and honour. There is the passion for military glory, the ambition of national greatness, the love of power, the thirst for all that violent excitement, for which war furnishes the food. Let the hearts of men be inflamed by these, let the people of this land be stirred by the idea of glorious victories, and of increasing the power and splendour of the nation, let this idea get abroad, kindling the minds of men, and to realize it—to

gratify their unenlightened patriotism, they will be ready to sacrifice all their commercial and economical interests at a blow. They will not stop to contemplate the blessings of peace which they madly fling away, or the horrors of war into which they rush. This has always been the way in which men have been betrayed into bloody conflict with one another, by their excited passions, misled by fine phrases, military glory, the honour of one's country, and so forth. Thus have they reconciled themselves to scenes of sickening carnage and butchery, to fields of battle covered with men gashed with horrid wounds and dying in protracted agonies, while the hearts of wives, parents, and children were breaking at home. I tell you men are as liable to be hurried away by blind passion now as ever, and should the ambition of national power take possession of our hearts, we shall grow deaf to the remonstrances of self-interest, and reason and humanity, and shall come to our senses again, only when irreparable mischief has been done; when the peaceful arts and industrious habits of life have all been destroyed; and when unnumbered families have suffered losses never to be made up.

It is true, the people of this land pass for a soberminded people, looking carefully after their own interests, and not apt to be carried away by enthusiasm of any sort. This may be true of our countrymen generally. Still there is abundantly enough of inflammable matter among us, to hurry us into a war, just as we have been hurried into Annexation, before we have fairly thought of it. The great mass of men are always willing to be led. The violence of a few will intimidate and overawe the multitude. Consider for one moment how this truth is illustrated in the case of him, whose birthday we are now celebrating. Jesus Christ came into the world,

spotless in the majesty of innocence, inspired with an unearthly wisdom, filled with divine power and love. He stood upon our earth, the image and representative of the Invisible Good. The glory of the living God shone through him; and coming as he did to give light to the mind, hope to the heart, peace to the conscience, salvation to the soul, to deliver men from all the terrible evils under which they lay crushed, he should have been received, we think, with acclamations. The whole world should have fallen down at his approach, and done him homage—hailing him with rapture as the angel of God. As we imagine it ought to have been, so in some degree it was. He was welcomed, heartily welcomed by the multitude. They thronged his steps. The common people listened to him gladly; and had it not been for the malignant passions of a few, it would have been comparatively easy for him to reduce the mass of the people among whom he appeared, to his divine authority. But no, the base and unprincipled, whose aims and interests were endangered by his fearless proclamation of truth, would not have it so. They proceeded stealthily at first, for they feared the people. But when they had once got him in their hands, they intimidated his friends. They succeeded in silencing every voice in his behalf; and the timid mass yielded. No doubt, many looked on at his trial with feelings of strong disapproval, for women followed him weeping to the place of execution, and the people returned from witnessing his death, smiting their breasts. Thus a wicked few succeeded in overawing the Jewish multitude, in quenching the light of the world, in saving Barabbas and crucifying Christ.

So has it been in every age of the world. The multitude, always ready to be led, have surrendered themselves to the

guidance of the bold bad few. It was so in that most fearful of human events, the French Revolution. Undoubtedly, there were thousands in France—I question not that there was a large majority in that country, and in its celebrated capital, who were shocked at the scenes of blood which were there enacted. But they were terrified into silence and submission. They no doubt thought within themselves: What can we do. They yielded as to a stern necessity; and so the nation went wading on up to the very lips in blood.

Therefore I say, my friends, if there is no deeply seated principle in the hearts of the people of our land against the commission of great national wrongs, and that there is no such principle, recent events furnish most decisive and alarming testimony, we have no security against the terrible calamity of war. We may have the character of being a cautious, self-interested people, looking always before we leap; but we may be hurried to the brink of the abyss and plunged directly into it by a few reckless, unprincipled men, who will drown every voice of opposition by their fierce clamour, and who, if they have no traitorous views of their own to serve, may be utterly blinded by the enchantments of that savage idol, Military Glory, that false god, which is still worshipped even in Christian lands, than which no object of heathen adoration is more hideous, and which might well be represented to our imaginations and to our eyes, arrayed in garments dabbled in blood, enthroned on human bones, with a quivering human heart between its teeth.

Who will venture to affirm, that there are no worshippers of this accursed idol in our land, ready and eager to render to it the bloody sacrifices which it demands? Who will venture to affirm this, when we hear men, high in place and

honour, publicly expressing the hope that if war does come, there will not be a single anti-war man in the whole nation, that every man of us will be ready to turn butcher, and shoot and stab and cut, that the spirit of humanity and of Jesus will be banished from every heart! O horrible hope! Who will dare to say, that there are no idolaters of military glory here, when from the same lofty place of honour and authority it is proclaimed that we must stand by our country right or wrong, that is, whether our country is on God's side or the Devil's, whether our country is about to obey or to break the eternal law, whether she submits to the Almighty, or sets herself in array against him! What impiety, what atheism can be compared with this? And what must be the moral condition of that people, whose elected rulers dare to express such outrageous contempt for the providence and law of God! Or again, what lover of peace is there, what believer in the impossibility of a war between this country and Great Britain, whose heart does not misgive him, when he hears all those, to whom the administration of our national affairs is entrusted, talking continually as if the honour of the country may require us to go to war, as if our highest honour did not consist in maintaining peace; as if in reference to the matter now in dispute between us and England, there were any disgrace possible to be incurred, let affairs turn which way they may, to be compared with the deep damnation of the deed, should we engage in war. That would cover us with disgrace, not the loss of territory, not the violation of our rights. But our leading men think not so. They contemplate war not as a shameful thing, but with composure, as the possible road to honour. It is not to be supposed that they are singular in this insensibility to the disgrace of war. They

represent, no doubt, in this respect the general sentiment of the country.

And although for my own part, I still remain fixed in the belief, that the war that is talked of is impossible, yet I cannot tell why I do so. Perhaps it is the remoteness of the cause of the difficulty between the two nations that induces the belief that war is not among the possibilities of the case: a distant tract of land, separated from us by nature, by a chain of mountains and by broad wastes, in which we have no personal interest, and in which the commerce of the country certainly has no general concern. It seems impossible that we should go to war on such an account. And yet the value of the matter in dispute weighs very little with nations, when the love of power is aroused, and when false points of honour are made. Then they are ready to rend and tear one another; not for any substantial benefit that is to be secured, but merely that they may point to the wounds they have inflicted and received. So that the distance and small value of the disputed territory are not sufficient reasons to justify our incredulity as to the impossibility of the threatened war.

One thing however is certain. If we believe war to be impossible, it is not because we have any satisfactory and decisive evidence, that the people of this land and of Great Britain are heartily averse to war. For we have many and most melancholy tokens to the contrary. It is plain enough from the current language of the day, that no deep, Christian devotion to peace prevails to any great extent; that the beauty, and worth, and sacred obligation of the principles of peace need to be urged, especially in the present temper of the public mind. In leading your attention this way, there-

fore, on this occasion, I would discharge what I cannot but consider an imperative duty; and I pray you to celebrate this Birthday of Jesus, by a new consecration of your hearts to the love and cultivation of his spirit.

This day, how touchingly does it plead with us in behalf of peace, not only by the religious recollections which it suggests, by the tender image of the holy child Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace,' which it calls up, but also by the pleasant customs to which it gives occasion. It is, among the members of this community, of all the days in the year, the day consecrated to domestic enjoyments. While external nature is wrapt in the barrenness of winter, and the living beauty of the earth is hidden under the desolate snow, on this day in all households the kindliest affections burst forth into bloom, and the inner world rejoices in a sudden and balmy spring. Tokens of friendship and affection are interchanged, and gifts of love; and young faces shine in smiles of gladness, and the old are beguiled of their sorrowful remembrances, losing themselves in sympathy with the young. Are your families, your children dear to you? Does one grateful emotion rise within you at this season, when you look upon the beaming countenances of the young, when you exchange congratulations with your kindred and friends? Are your countless domestic blessings of any value in your eyes, the happy fireside, the abundant table, the means you possess of gratifying your affections, of contributing to the happiness of those around you, that dear circle with which your heart is interwoven by so many strong and tender ties? Consider then how much you are indebted for the calm security of your domestic pleasures to the priceless blessing of peace. Consider how fearfully the whole aspect of things would be changed, if the awful cloud of war, laden with tempests, were hanging

over the land; if your means of life were all put in peril, as they would be, in case of the occurrence of actual hostilities; if our shores were threatened by an invading enemy; if our friends in distant parts of the country were exposed to loss and danger; and if our minds were haunted by those anxious forebodings which a state of warfare must inevitably occasion? Could we remain unmoved by the melancholy tidings, that would be borne to us with lightning-speed of bloodshed and burnings, the laying waste of the treasured stores of the harvest, the conflagration of towns and villages? Could the dazzling splendour of national glory hide from us the bloodstained features of war, when it should actually approach and appal us with wounds and groans, with the spectacle of wealth vanishing, and poverty coming, like an armed man, upon those now living in plenty? If the cheerful and kindly customs of the present season are pleasant in your eyes, as you love your own homes, never again speak, never again think lightly of war; but denounce it utterly as an unmitigated curse, as the deadly foe that threatens your households, driving or enticing your sons, and your fathers, and your husbands to the field of blood.

What a magnificent testimony have we to the power of peace in the life of Him, whose birthday we now celebrate! Born in the humblest condition, going about without a home, with no instrument of violence in his hand, exposed to the hatred and power of evil men, seized by them and hurried away in the bloom of life to a cruel and shameful death, yet has he succeeded as none of the great soldiers of the world, none of our Alexanders or Napoleons have ever succeeded, in realizing the sublime idea of Universal Conquest. His name is above every name, and his spirit, although still

greatly restricted in its influence, has softened and is softening the bloody customs of the world, breathing its peace through the iron breastplate of War, corroding the edge of the sword, wearing away the chains which man fastens on his brother, and giving us the blessed vision of a day of universal peace, far distant indeed, but still afar off its Coming shines. This, it seems to me, is the one great lesson which the life of Christ enforces, the victorious power of Truth, the supremacy of moral power above physical power. In this way is the world to be conquered; not by ships of war and multitudinous armies, but by identifying our cause with the cause of right, of peace, and of Christianity. Turn away then from the gleaming sword and the garments rolled in blood, and gather with loyal hearts round the white standard of the Cross, that symbol of the valour and the victory of Suffering. Let us bind ourselves anew, this day, to the service of the Prince of Peace. Let his reign, begun in our households, be established over the nation, and should public war come, let us trust in God, that as there are men of war there will also be men of peace—thousands and tens of thousands, ready to suffer the greatest injury rather than inflict the least, ready to follow Jesus, and obey the God of Peace.